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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Major media reported that today in Washington, President Bush, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel will address the American Jewish Committee (AJC), which celebrates its 100th anniversary. Israel Radio noted that no representative of the GOI will participate in the event, due to the swearing-in of the government. Maariv, The Jerusalem Post, and Israel Radio quoted prominent liberal Israeli writer A. B. Yehoshua as saying during a panel discussion that was part of the AJC celebrations held at the Library of Congress on Tuesday that Zionism was the only thing that succeeded in the Jewish world in the past 100 years. The media reported that Yehoshua's comments angered senior Jewish American leaders.

All media highlighted the swearing-in of the 25 members of Ehud Olmert's new government, which is expected to take place at the Knesset today. At noon, the electronic media reported that the Knesset unanimously elected MK Dalia Itzik (Kadima) to the post of Speaker of the Knesset. Ha'aretz quoted political sources as saying that Olmert plans to implement the convergence plan to define Israel's borders in the West Bank within two years. Israel Radio reported that further to managing culture, sports, and Jerusalem affairs, Ophir Pines-Paz (Labor) will be science minister. In an interview with Yediot, designated education minister Yuli Tami (Labor) was quoted as saying that the Israeli school systems will prepare students for the convergence move.

An interview with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas led Maariv's coverage. Abbas was quoted as saying that Israel-PA negotiations must resume immediately, that Hamas is not an obstacle to talks, that he has a mandate to reach an agreement with Olmert, and that the opportunity should not be missed. Ha'aretz quoted Khaled Mashal, head of Hamas's political bureau, as saying in a public appearance in Damascus Wednesday that Hamas could offer a "serious step" toward peace if Israel withdraws from all lands occupied in 1967 and recognizes Palestinian refugees' "right of return." However, Mashal was quoted as saying that he did not think Israel was likely to do in the foreseeable future, leaving the Palestinians no option but to continue to resist the occupation.

Like other media, Yediot reported that Morocco, Italy, Sweden, and France have refused to admit Hamas representative in their countries. This morning, Israel Radio reported that Egyptian FM Ahmed Ali Abu al-Gheit canceled a meeting with his PA counterpart, Mahmoud Zahar. Ha'aretz reported that the US is thwarting several initiatives by donor states to bypass the Hamas government and get money directly to the Palestinians. Ha'aretz mentioned that the British government, in partnership with the European Commission

and the Arab League, suggested last week that donor states' money and the taxes that Israel collects for the PA be transferred directly to the Palestinians through the World Bank-managed Holst Fund. The newspaper reported that the US objected to the plan and blocked it, with the encouragement of senior officials, and that this was one of the reasons for Quartet envoy James Wolfensohn's resignation on Sunday. Ha'aretz reported that the leaders of the Quartet are expected to discuss these issues at a meeting with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan next Tuesday. Ha'aretz wrote that the US has also prevented the transfer of USD 71 million in Arab League funds directly to Palestinians' accounts. The newspaper reported that on Wednesday, a Western diplomat familiar with the matter accused Deputy National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams and Assistant Secretary of State David Welch of recklessly trying to engineer the collapse of the PA's systems. The diplomat was quoted as saying that the two assume that this would lead to the collapse of the Hamas government and to Fatah's regaining control. Ha'aretz said that outgoing Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and his senior advisor, Amos Gilad, have encouraged the US to foil any initiative to transfer funds for vital services in the territories.

Ha'aretz quoted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as saying Wednesday, in an interview with American media outlets, that Israel needs to respond favorably to peace efforts and understand that unilateral measures will not bring lasting peace. However, Mubarak was quoted as saying that peace negotiations cannot begin until the Palestinians resolve their internal disagreements.

The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that on Wednesday, at a reception for diplomats, church leaders, and heads of non-Jewish communities in Israel, President Moshe Katsav called on Palestinian leaders to respect the conditions set by the Quartet for renewal of the political dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians. Katsav was quoted as saying that such a process would eventually lead to the realization of the proposed two-state solution.

Major media reported that the police and the IDF are bracing for the possible evacuation today of three settler families from a Palestinian home in Hebron. The media reported that the High Court of Justice is expected to rule today on a petition against the eviction order submitted by the Jewish community of Hebron.

All media reported that Sgt. Hananel Dayan, one of 120 soldiers who received commendations at Wednesday's traditional Independence Day ceremony at the Israeli President's Residence, refused to shake hands with IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz, in protest over what he called the "expulsion" of the Gaza settlers.

The Jerusalem Post reported that following assassination threats by Hamas and Al Qaida against top Fatah officials, Fatah gunmen in the Gaza Strip have announced the formation of a new security force to protect their leaders.

The Jerusalem Post quoted former US Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer as saying at Harvard University last week that the asymmetrical relationship between Israel and the Palestinians caused the failure of the Oslo peace process. However, The Jerusalem Post quoted Kurtzer as saying that both sides were to blame for lacking political strategies to follow their military strategies.

Leading media reported that the US, Britain, and France are seeking to pass a UN Security Council resolution that would make the Council's earlier demand mandatory. Israel Radio reported that during their meeting at the White House on Wednesday, President Bush and German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that Iran should not be allowed to obtain nuclear weapons. Israel Radio quoted Russia's UN envoy as saying that Moscow would be prepared to back a UNSC draft resolution on the Iranian nuclear crisis if its concerns were addressed. Citing news agencies, Ha'aretz reported that on Wednesday the Iranian military rejected a statement by Mohammad Ebrahim Dehghani, a top Revolutionary Guards commander, according to a dispatch published by the Iranian Student News Agency on Tuesday, that Israel would be Iran's first retaliatory target in response to any US attack.

Hatzofe quoted Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns as saying Tuesday in Paris that the US and France intend to introduce a new "strongly

worded" UN resolution against Syria.

Maariv reported that on Tuesday, two PA policemen were killed and two others were wounded by a Qassam rocket in the Jebalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. The newspaper wrote that the rocket appears to have been launched in the direction of Israel and that its trajectory was too short.

Ha'aretz found that Mofaz took advantage of his authority under the so-called "Intifada Law" to exempt the IDF almost entirely from liability or property damage in the territories since September 2000. The "Intifada Law" was passed in July 2005 as an amendment to the Torts Law (Liability of the State).

Ha'aretz reported that over 2,500 people, including public figures from the Israeli Arab sector, took part in Wednesday's ninth annual march to mark the "Nakba" (catastrophe), the term used by Palestinians for Israel's victory in the 1948 War of Independence and its aftermath. The march took place on the site of the abandoned village of Umm al-Zinat on Mt. Carmel.

Ha'aretz reported that FM Tzipi Livni has appointed former journalist Ilan Jonas as her bureau chief. Jonas, who has been studying at Princeton University for the past few years, will enter his post in the next few weeks.

Ha'aretz and Yediot reported that officials of Brandeis University have removed artwork that depicts injured and bloodied Palestinian children. The images were painted by Palestinian teenagers at the request of an Israeli Jewish student at the Jewish-sponsored college. AP (cited in Ha'aretz) wrote that the student wanted to bring the Palestinian viewpoint to the campus, but that school officials said that the paintings were too one-sided.

Maariv reported that the American Jewish Committee (AJC) has suggested to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak that he help preserve 12 remaining synagogues in Egypt, in exchange for their restoration by the AJC.

Yediot cited The New York Times as saying Wednesday that at a government observatory called Starfire in the New Mexico desert, the Bush administration is seeking to develop a powerful ground-based laser weapon that would use beams of concentrated light to destroy enemy satellites in orbit.

Major media reported that a US jury in Alexandria, Virginia, decided on Wednesday that 9/11 conspirator Zacarias Moussaoui should spend his life in prison instead of being executed for his role in the hijacked airliner attacks.

Yediot and Maariv reported that American actor Jim Carrey arrived in Israel on Wednesday. He will be staying in the country until Sunday.

Mideast:

Summary:

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The Americans will not get in the way of [Olmert's] convergence plan.... [However], without an agreement with the Palestinians, it is doubtful that Israel will get any American financing for it."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "[Olmert must be] careful not to exaggerate Abbas's standing as the 'good cop' compared to Hamas as the 'bad cop.'"

Block Quotes:

I. "Ehud Barak as Convergence Chief"

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (5/4): "At the end of May, Olmert is slated to make an official visit to Washington. He will be received with all due ceremony. The Bush administration, after all, wanted Kadima's victory. The Americans will not get in the way of the convergence plan. Iraq and Iran are much higher priorities for them. Unofficially, the administration might put out feelers about the possibility of a withdrawal agreement with the Palestinians, on the assumption that any agreement could help Abbas continue

in his job. Few know today what is included in the convergence plan. At this stage, it appears to be mostly a collection of general ideas. However, if it is executed, it will be a complex national project. First, it will be enormously expensive, and without an agreement with the Palestinians, it is doubtful that Israel will get any American financing for it. Secondly, who will plan and execute it for Olmert? The combined experience of the triumvirate of Olmert-Amir Peretz-Tzipi Livni on diplomatic and security issues is fairly limited. In light of the vacuum that has been created, an interesting idea has come up lately in defense circles: appointing Ehud Barak to chair the National Security Council."

II. "Meeting Abbas"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (5/4): "Vice Premier Shimon Peres told The Jerusalem Post this week that a meeting between Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas is likely to take place later this month, after Olmert returns from his first trip to Washington as prime minister. The announcement was not surprising. Olmert had already spelled out his intention, in his electoral victory speech, to give the Palestinians one last chance to 'change their ethos, to accept compromise as soon as possible.' Olmert said then, 'If they manage to do this soon, we will sit and work out a plan. If not, Israel will take control of its own fate...' Olmert must make good on his election night pledge, both to maintain his credibility and to demonstrate to the international community -- much of which strongly prefers a bilateral agreement over unilateral action -- that he is not running roughshod over the Palestinians by single-mindedly forging ahead with his convergence plan. However, he must do so while being careful not to exaggerate Abbas's standing as the 'good cop' compared to Hamas as the 'bad cop'.... The chances that Olmert's talks with Abbas will produce positive, concrete results are slim, but the possibility of their facilitating a crack in the wall of international opposition to the Hamas government is real. Olmert would do well, therefore, to publicly frame the discussions very carefully, clearly explaining Israel's expectations of Abbas and the Palestinians, and emphasizing that the talks are a last gasp attempt to salvage bilateralism -- and not recognition of the legitimacy of the Hamas-dominated PA that Abbas ostensibly leads."

JONES